



Financial and Other Competing Interests: Be Aware♦

Horacio Rivera,* Arturo Panduro**

* División de Genética, Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, Centro de Investigación Biomédica de Occidente, Guadalajara, Mexico and
Departamento de Biología Molecular y Genómica, Centro Universitario de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6940-0668>

** Department of Molecular Biology in Medicine, Civil Hospital of Guadalajara, "Fray Antonio Alcalde" and
Health Sciences Center, University of Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

Financial conflicts of interest and other competing interests have been relevant ethical concerns even before their formal recognition in 1984.¹ Indeed, it is agreed that all actors involved in biomedical research must be aware of these undue influences and held responsible of their proper management.

Although financial conflicts of interest are widespread and make headlines as illustrated by the recent scandal around Joseph Baselga,² so-called intellectual or nonfinancial conflicts such as those arising from personal relationships also exist.³⁻⁵ However, the diverse interests inherent to each scientist and ranging from personal beliefs to desire for fame or glory should not be labeled as conflicts of interest; rather, scientists should practice a "passionate detachment" from their own interests to discern how these influences affect the production and sharing of knowledge.⁵ While these authors recognize that disclosure is indeed essential, they propose that "it is necessary that policy action go beyond disclosure to ensure that disclosures do not provide a moral license to dispense with their actual management". Moreover, they advocate for using the reflexivity approach — a tool borrowed from social sciences — to identify and deal with competing interests.

Other authors⁶ have attempted to distinguish conflicts of interest from conflicts of commitment: the former exist between professional interests and financial or personal interests while the latter occur between two or more sets of professional commitments, e.g., it may be difficult for a professor to honor his/her obligations to give conferences or lead symposia and properly mentor graduate students.

The results of a survey on inappropriate authorship, plagiarism, and undeclared conflicts of interests addressed to 198 authors (52 from Latin America and 146 from other emerging countries) of review articles published in the Cochrane library disclosed that authors from developing nations exhibited a greater difficulty than their peers from developed economies to understand and declare competing interests, particularly the intellectual or nonfinancial ones. In contrast, the driving factors and occurrence of all three malpractices were comparable around the world.⁷

As a journal that follows the recommendations of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), *Annals of Hepatology* is enforcing the disclosure of both financial and intellectual conflicts of interest. Hence, from now on, the journal will require the authors to download and complete the appropriate form available at the ICMJE website (<http://www.icmje.org/conflicts-of-interest/>).

REFERENCES

1. Relman AS. Dealing with conflicts of interest. *N Eng J Med* 1984; 316: 1182-3.
2. Oransky I, Marcus A. Why do medical journals keep taking authors at their word? *STAT* 2018. <https://www.statnews.com/2018/09/14/jose-baselga-doctors-industry-conflict/>
3. Akl EA, El-Hachemd P, Abou-Haidare H, Neumann I, Schünemann HJ, Guyatt GH. Considering intellectual, in addition to financial, conflicts of interest proved important in a clinical practice guideline: a descriptive study. *J Clin Epidemiol* 2014; 67: 1222-8.

♦ This note minimally overlaps the corresponding section in the educational project "Ética en la Investigación Clínica" of the Coordinación de Educación en Salud, Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (registration in process before the Instituto Nacional del Derecho de Autor, 2018).

4. Tugwell P, Knottmures JA. Should guideline panels declare nonfinancial conflicts of interest? (Editorial). *J Clin Epidemiol* 2014; 67: 1179-80.
5. Bero LA, Grundy Q. Why having a (nonfinancial) interest is not a conflict of interest. *PLoS Biol* 2016; 14: e2001221. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.2001221
6. Werhane P, Doering J. Conflicts of interest and conflicts of commitment. In: Elliot D, Stern JE (eds.). *Research Ethics. A Reader*. University Press of New England. Hanover: 1997; p. 165-89.
7. Rohwer A, Young T, Wager E, Garner P. Authorship, plagiarism and conflict of interest: views and practices from low/middle-income country health researchers. *BMJ Open* 2017; 7(11): e018467.

Correspondence and reprint request:

Arturo Panduro, M.D., Ph.D., FAASLD.
Department of Molecular Biology in Medicine, Civil Hospital of
Guadalajara, "Fray Antonio Alcalde" and Health Sciences
Center, University of Guadalajara.
Calle Hospital # 278, Col. El Retiro, 44280, Guadalajara, Jalisco,
Mexico. Tel.: (52) 33 36147743.
E-mail: apanduro@prodigy.net.mx; biomomed@cencar.udg.mx